Report No. 4.—Whitework and Various Articles of Clothing, &c.

Included under the general technical denomination of "whitework" are many articles made of calico, linen, holland, and similar materials, and comprising women's underclothing, children's clothing, house linen, &c., the manufacture of which is generally carried on in factories or workshops attached to drapery establishments, and also to a considerable extent in the private homes of the workers. It forms, however, but a portion of the work, other articles, such as blouses, mantles, babies' flannel gowns and hoods, women's morning wrappers and cloth coats, children's print dresses and pinafores, dust cloaks, holland aprons, Crimean shirts, &c., being largely manufactured in the same places. The conditions in connection with the making of these articles and of "whitework" are in no way different, and it will therefore be convenient to deal with them both at the same time.

Accommodation.

The provisions for the health, comfort, and convenience of the workers in factories and workshops are on the whole very satisfactory. In all the larger establishments the workrooms are spacious, well lighted, and well ventilated, and in two of them there is a separate luncheon-room, where tea is provided for the operatives. In one case the workers complain of the sanitary conveniences, which are merely partitioned off from the workroom, and are at times very obnoxious, especially to those who work closest to them, but generally speaking the conditions in connection with the factories are fairly satisfactory, though with some notable exceptions, including the establishments of certain Syrian manufacturers, who cater for the supply of goods to Indian and other hawkers. In one of these a most offensive smell pervaded the workrooms, and the surroundings generally were filthy and disgusting; in another the conveniences were in an abominably dirty state, and gave forth a sickening stench, highly suggestive of danger to the public health. Strange to say, the girls employed in these places, who are all machinists, earning a smaller average wage than the operatives in any other establishment examined, and who are surrounded by conditions so very much the reverse of enticing, express their satisfaction with employers and employment.

Division of Labour.

In this branch of the sewing industry there are two main classes of workers, employees in shops and factories, and "home-workers." Factory operatives as a rule, are regularly trained in the business from apprenticeship upwards, the regular gradations among those who do "white work" being apprentices, improvers, finishers, machinists, forewomen, and cutters. There are also mantle-cutters and assistants, who usually do no other kind of work Of all grades there are in the factories and workshops examined about 400 hands, the greatest number in any factory being 100, and in any workshop, seventy-one, the fewest numbers being ten and two respectively. Considerably more than half the entire number are machinists, the next in proportion being improvers, and the next apprentices. It is impossible to form any idea of the number of home-workers who take work from factories and shops to be done in their own homes, and in their own time. Few of them have served any regular apprenticeship, and there is no division of labour among them, all operations being generally performed by the same hands, except in the rare instances where apprentices or assistants are employed. They are mostly widows, or wives whose husbands are prevented by sickness or other causes from maintaining their families. In such cases upon the wives and mothers, in addition to their ordinary household and family cares, falls the burden of providing the means of subsistence. Among them are women of refinement reduced by misfortune from a position of comparative affluence to an incessant hand to hand struggle against poverty, whose condition is all the more pitiable because their desire to conceal the fact that they work for their living is generally regarded by employers as a reason for paying them lower wages. Many distressing cases have come under observation where such women, with all the responsibilities of supporting their families, in addition to their household work, have toiled twelve and thirteen hours a day at their needles, and even then earning an excessively small pittance totally inadequate to their labour, or to provide the barest necessaries of life.

Hours of Labour.

In factories and workshops the hours of labour usually observed are from 8·45 a.m. to 6 p.m., with half-an-hour for lunch, on five days, and to 1 p.m. on Saturdays, making a total of forty-eight hours per week. In some places an hour is allowed for lunch and the week's work occupies from forty-four to forty-five hours. Overtime is very rare, and when it occurs the hands usually receive a bonus of 6d., or 4d. for tea, and a proportion of their ordinary wages, or the amount they earn on piecework. In the slack period near the end of the year a holiday of about a fortnight, without pay, is usually given by the factories to all but the indispensable hands, a practice seldom objected to by the girls, except when they are inconvenienced by the temporary cessation of their earnings.

Homeworkers' hours of labour are subject only to the will or the necessity of the individuals, and even they themselves can seldom give more than an approximate estimate of the number of hours daily devoted to sewing. They are subject to numerous interruptions from their household and family duties, and it is frequently necessary for them to work late at night in order to earn their daily bread. The comparison of a large number of cases shows that their hours per week vary from forty to seventy-eight, and that fifty-eight hours make an average week's work amongst them. It is a noteworthy fact that, notwithstanding overwork and microscopic remuneration, they are still able in many cases to keep their homes clean and respectable, even while they themselves are but scantily fed.

Wages.

In factories and workshops some of the hands are on piecework, but the majority receive weekly wages, the rates paid in five establishments, employing altogether 254 hands, being as exhibited in the following table:—

Grades.	1				2				3				4				5					
	No. of hands.	Wages. Highest.	Lowest.	Average.	No. of hands.	Wages. Highest.	Lowest.	Average.	No. of hands.	Wages. Highest.	Lowest.	Average.	No. of hands.	Wages. Highest.	Lowest.	Average.	No. of hands.	Wages. Highest.	Lowest.	Average.	Total hands.	General average Wages.
Apprentices	10	5/-	5/-	5/-	2	5/-	5/-	5/-	12	2/6	..	1/3	..	..	..	..	10	..	2/6	2/6	34	4/5
Improvers	10	9/-	7/-	7/8	3	9/-	7/-	7/8	30	10/-	5/-	6/8	4	10/-	7/6	8/4	10	..	5/-	5/-	57	7/1
Finishers	10	10/-	7/-	8/-	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	10	8/-
,, on piece-work		10/-	5/-	6/8	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	10	10/-	7/-	8/-	10	7/4
Machinists	62	20/-	10/-	13/4	10	20/-	10/-	13/4	9	30/-	15/-	20/-	5	20/-	15/-	16/8	34	20/-	12/-	14/8	120	14/4
,, on piece-work	3	25/-	12/-	16/4	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6	22/6	10/-	13/6	9	14/5
Forewomen	2	..	40/-	40/-	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2	..	50/-	50/-	4	50/-
Cutters of white work	2	60/-	40/-	50/-	1	..	35/-	35/-	1	..	60/-	60/-	..	..	..	..	3	..	45/-	45/-	7	47/2
,, mantles	1	..	100/-	100/-	..	..	..	..	1	..	90/-	90/-	1	..	35/-	35/-	..	..	..	..	3	75/-

In addition to the hands included above, eighteen mantle-makers' assistants are employed, receiving 30s. to 15s. a week, an average of 18s. 6d., also twenty machinists, 20s. to 15s., an average of 16s. 8d. per week, and ten machinists on piece-work, 20s. to 9s., an average of 11s. 9d. each per week. Of all grades there are in these establishments 318 hands, receiving an average weekly wage of 13s. 10d. each, or, excluding fifteen cutters and forewomen whose average weekly wage is 53s. 8d., there are 303 workers on an average wage of 11s. 10d. each per week. A strict record is kept of the work done by each hand in a factory, so that if a worker on weekly wage fails to complete a sufficient quantity of work in the week she is at once put on piece-work or dismissed. Those on piece-work again, if it is found that they can earn high wages at certain work, are not infrequently put on weekly wages, an arrangement affording a higher percentage of profit to the employers. The amount each worker should earn for her employer differs in each factory, the value of the work done usually ranging from 30 to 100 or 200 per cent. above the wages paid for it; the worker who receives 12s. per week earning from 4s. or 6s. to 12s. or 24s. a week for her employer. For stitching on piece-work the price usually paid in factories is 1s. per 100 yards, and a smart worker can do about 1,200 yards a week, averaging 2s. a day. At mattress-making the sum a quick and skilful worker can earn in a week ranges from 16s. to 20s. at 4s. per dozen, but ordinary hands cannot make more than 2 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ dozen a week. If the price paid for piece-work were calculated on a fixed standard of relation to weekly wages the system would be relieved of one of its worst features; but in factories where work is done in great part by the piece employers usually offer work to the piece-hands at a price per dozen, and then take contracts from the wholesale houses to supply the articles in large quantities at a price calculated to leave themselves a large margin of profit, in which the worker does not participate. In this way the earnings of piece-workers are reduced to the lowest figure that will afford a bare subsistence, employers relying on the reluctance of the hands to refuse work until the insufficiency of the remuneration has been demonstrated by personal experience.

From operatives engaged in various factories, and numbering altogether less than fifty, the following statement of wages have been obtained, the averages of which are, on account of the small number compared, somewhat different from those given in the preceding table.

Grade.	Weekly Wages. Lowest.	Highest.	Average.
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
Apprentices	0 2 6	0 2 6	0 2 6
Improvers	0 5 0	0 5 0	0 5 0
Finishers	0 7 6	0 13 0	0 8 10
,, on piece	0 12 6	0 15 0	0 13 6
Machinists	0 6 0	1 10 0	0 16 2
,, on piece	0 9 0	0 19 6	0 12 8

Earnings of Homeworkers.

Homeworkers are engaged in all branches of needlework, either working alone, or with other members of their own families, though occasionally they employ one or two assistants as apprentices or improvers. Their earnings vary considerably, the lowest return for a week's work being 2s. 3d., and the highest 72s.; but these are both exceptional cases, ordinary rates ranging from 8s. to 20s. a week, or, allowing for cotton, travelling expenses, machine-hire, &c., from 6s. to 15s. when in full work. Homeworkers do not receive the same rates as factory hands, but for less than machinists' pay must do the work of both machinist and finisher. A few years ago there were no factories or middlemen, and the workers dealt directly with the wholesale firms, and were much better off than they are at present. The establishment of factories, where the work is done by steam-driven machinery, has materially affected their position, for they are necessarily sufferers to the extent of the factory proprietors' profits, and also from the reduction of prices by competing factories. They are also generally less skilful than trained factory operatives, and have not the advantage of steam power to drive their machines, consequently their work is much more fatiguing and requires longer hours than factory work. A good general notion of the articles they manufacture, their hours of labour, and rates of remuneration may be gathered

gathered from the annexed table, compiled from the statements of homeworkers employed for factories and for retail shops:—

Employees.	Hours per week.	Gross earnings.	Articles made.	Price per dozen.	Employees.	Hours per week.	Gross earnings.	Articles made.	Price per dozen.
No. 1	66	27/6	Mantles	6/-	No. 28	48	12/-	Fancy work	.....
2	60	37/-	Morning wrappers	9/-	29	60	27/6	Blouses	5/6
3	48	12/-	Blouses	2/6				Mantles	13/-
4	40	8/-	.....	.....	30	45	9/-	Blouses	3/6
5	45	14/-	Mattrass cases	4/-			12/-	Blouses	6/-, 7/6
6	60	15/-	Babies' hoods	5/6	31	60	12/-	Children's print dresses	2/6
7	72	20/-	Mantles	6/-				Children's pinafores	2/3
8	66	12/-	.....	.....	32	48	13/6	Babies' hoods	2/8, 3/4
9	66	12/-	Morning wrappers	9/-	33	72	18/-	Blouses	3/-
10	60	12/-	.....	.....					1/6
11	48	12/6	.....	.....	34	78	12/6	Pillow-slips	2/6
12	48	15/-	Aprons	1/6					3/-
			Mantles	13/-	35	66	8/-	Ladies' dust-cloaks	12/-
13	48	14/-	Mantles	12/-			13/-	Ladies' dust-cloaks	9/-, 12/-
14	45	14/-	.....	.....	36	72	13/-	Ladies' cloth coats	15-/, 22/6
15	45	13/6	Children's pinafores	2/3			13/-	Ladies' underclothing	12/-
16	48	15/-	Morning wrappers	10/-				Blouses	2/6
17	45	10/-	Children's pinafores	2/6	37	72	12/6	Mantles	12/-
18	78	.....	Flannel gowns	18/-				Morning wrappers	8/-
		.....	Babies' hoods	24/-				Mantles	13/6
19	66	22/-	Pillow-slips	3/-	38	48	12/-	Ladies' coats	15/-
		27/-	Pillow-slips	3/9				Blouses	3/-
20	48	15/-	Pillow-slips	6/-	39	48	15/-	Children's pinafores	2/3
21	66	24/-	Ladies' coats	8/-				Mantles	6/-, 12/-
22	66	13/6	Children's print dresses	4/6	40	45	10/-	Children's pinafores	4/6
		13/6	Children's pinafores	2/-				Ladies underclothing	1/9
23	72	15/9	Children's print dresses	4/6	41	72	22/6	Blouses	3/9
		13/6	Children's pinafores	3/6				Mantles	12/-
24	72	6/-	White blouses	3/-	42	60	10/-	Mantles	22/-
		4/6	Children's pinafores	2/3	43	60	12/6	Blouses	6/-, 9/-
25	72	2/3	Children's pinafores	2/3	44	48	18/-	Blouses	9/-
26	60	9/-	Ladies' dust-cloaks	13/-			22/6		18/
27	48	6/-	Children's pinafores	4/6	45	48	22/6	.....	.....

Excluding five abnormally high and two exceptionally low earnings the average gross weekly wage for the remainder is 14s. 9d.; but from this must be subtracted, for travelling and other expenses and deductions, an average of 3s. per week, leaving an average net weekly wage of 11s. 9d. per head for home-workers. The above list discloses remarkable variations in the earnings of different workers at the same work, one receiving 13s. 6d. per week for making children's pinafores at 2s. per dozen, equal to $6\frac{3}{4}$ dozen per week, whilst another can earn only 2s. 3d. for 1 dozen. At blouse-making one earns 9s. a week at 6s. per dozen, whilst another earns 18s. a week at 3s. per dozen. The discrepancies in prices are due chiefly to differences in the quality of the work done, but to some extent to the fact that the higher prices are earned by operatives who obtain the work directly from the large retail houses, the lower prices by those who work for factories, and go far in support of the complaint everywhere urged by home workers that factory proprietors have made their business less remunerative than formerly. The differences in amounts earned by workers at the same articles are chiefly due to differences of individual skill.

Apprenticeship.

The term of apprenticeship usually arranged for is from twelve to eighteen months, on verbal agreement only; wages 2s. 6d. per week for the first six months, except in one establishment, where no wages are paid during the first year. In factories there is no fixed rule of advancement but individual capacity, the term of probation for girls of exceptional ability being sometimes very short, as, for instance, in the case of a girl under 15 years of age who was earning 14s. to 15s. per week on piece-work within ten weeks of her admission as apprentice. Such examples are very rare; and, although it is perfectly true, as stated by a factory proprietor, that in six months a smart girl can earn from 15s. to 20s. a week and keep herself in comfort, the majority of girls are not smart, and their earnings, after a much longer probation, are generally less than 10s., seldom more than 15s., a week.

General Remarks.

The conditions under which factory hands work are generally good, and there is in this occupation nothing prejudicial to health; but home-workers, who are compelled to work long hours on insufficient food and with unwholesome surroundings, find the extra fatigue of working their sewing-machines exercises a very injurious effect, though otherwise their work is not unhealthy. They are mostly of opinion that it is impossible for a woman to maintain a home, and difficult even to keep herself, on her earnings in this industry. The earnings of the younger operatives who reside with their parents form a welcome addition to the family income; but in cases where girls have to pay 10s. or more per week for lodgings they have seldom enough to keep them from week to week, and when any interruption in work occurs they are reduced to great straits. In the homes visited the conditions observed were as follows:—Good to very good, 20; fair, 13; poor to very poor, 16. Though signs of poverty were everywhere apparent, and the homes generally were situated in poor localities, they were clean and well cared for, except in cases where the housekeepers excused themselves for not keeping things tidy, by saying they could not spare the time from their work. Employers agree that the girls are respectable and of good moral character.